

BELLY BUTTON TRAINING

Belly buttons are very cool. Centering the activity on them makes it a little more fun and memorable. The goal is to create an understanding of how participants' center of gravity affects their balance. The preactivity discussion will help them understand the concept intellectually as well as kinesthetically. All of this makes belly buttons easy, fun, and practical to use in balance training.

Benefits »

- Introduces center of gravity and builds sensory awareness of it.
- Works well with many other ABLE Bodies activities.
- Offers practical applications in everyday tasks.

Set It Up »

For most of these versions, each person will need a Thera-Band knotted at one end. A long scarf or heavy string may work also. If you have it, tie a golf ball or heavy object in the knot so the cord will hang straighter and work better as a plumb line. Participants will hold it in their hand as a plumb line between their belly button and the floor. The line and where it hits the ground provides a visual marker of where their center of gravity meets the ground.

How to Do It »

Start with a discussion about how each person's belly button is approximately their balance point, or center of gravity. That is, if they were a spinning top, or if they did a million cartwheels, their limbs would spin through the air around their center, their balance point—their belly button! The belly button marks their center of gravity.

Then you might begin with a review of an earlier activity such as Anchors A-Sway, if you've done that one with your participants. The review will link previous information with this new information and expand their understanding. In Anchors A-Sway, participants discovered that the farther they leaned forward, the more likely it became that they'd need to take a step or risk toppling over. Demonstrate this for them. As you lean further and further forward, it is your center of gravity (belly button) that moves closer and closer to the edge of your base of support (your feet). At a certain point, you need to take a step. Explain and demonstrate that if their center point (their belly button) moves beyond their base of support (their feet), they too must take a step or topple forward. They have reached their tipping point. Encourage a few to try this tipping point exercise.

The Start

Hand each participant the knotted Thera-Bands you have ready and ask them to stand in front of their chair or with other balance support, as needed.

The Moves

Belly Stands

- Participants' feet are shoulder-width apart, equally weighted; torso is braced.
- Shoulders are over hips, abs are in, and head is retracted.
- Weight should be equal over both feet.
- Participants hold one end of the band against their belly button and adjust the length so the other end barely touches the floor.

● Ask the following:

- Can you feel your weight evenly distributed over both feet?
- Where is your belly button in relationship to your feet? (Between.)
- If you drew a straight line down from your belly to the floor, where would it land? (Between.)
- Observe where your band touches the ground. (Because their weight is equally distributed over both feet, the band should touch the floor right between their feet).
- Now, look down. Is that where the band is touching the floor?
- It is? Perfect! That's as it should be. It means that your center of gravity is centered over and between your feet.



Belly Weight Shifts to One Side

In this activity, participants practice shifting their weight from one foot to the other. Where their Thera-Band touches the floor will change with their sways. The object of the lesson is to explore these changes. The band will follow the movement of their belly. As they shift their weight to the right, the band will move toward the right foot, and vice versa. The first goal is for them to notice the effect of weight shifts on the movement of the band and to get a sense that the band marks the plumb line position of their center of gravity over the ground. A secondary goal is to help participants understand how centering their belly button over their supporting leg is necessary for eventually standing on one leg successfully.

- Without changing how they are standing (weight equal on both feet), participants try to lift one foot off the ground. (It should not be possible.)
- What, no luck? What happened?
- Let them try again. Remember, no weight shifting or leaning!
- It's just not possible to lift one foot with their weight still on it. To lift one leg, they must first remove the weight from it. The question is how to do that without losing their balance.
- Using their belly button hand, participants will drag the belly button to the right. That means shift the whole torso—head, neck, and trunk. Don't lean or tip the box, just move it directly sideways and over the right foot. (Participants should be standing upright with weight over the right leg.)
 - Which foot feels your weight now? (Right)
 - Which foot is unweighted? (Left)
 - Look down and notice where your Thera-Band is touching the floor. (Inside of right foot)
 - It should have moved over, too. It should be touching the inside of the right foot. The plumb line reflects the change in position of your center of gravity to the right.



- ⊙ Participants return their belly button to the center position.
 - Drag the belly button left. The whole torso moves left (head, neck, trunk).
 - No leaning! Shift the whole torso, like it's one big box.
 - Is the band touching the inside of the left foot? It should be!
- ⊙ Participants return their belly button to the center position.
- ⊙ Repeat sways several times. Watch how band moves along the ground, side to side, with the weight shifts.
- ⊙ Be sure they are moving the whole torso left or right, and not just leaning or tilting the upper body.

Belly Weight Shifts to a One-Legged Stand

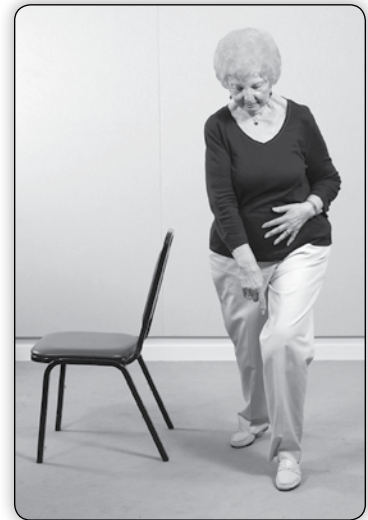
- ⊙ Participants begin in a tall posture, as before—feet shoulder-width apart, torso stable, and knees soft. (Soft knees will help them maintain balance when shifting weight over one leg.)
- ⊙ Drag the belly button right. Move the whole torso over.
 - Check your band. Is it showing that your belly button is over the left foot?
 - Do you notice that your right foot is *unweighted*?
 - Move your right foot slowly up and in front of the other foot; keep the abs in and body tall. Now the left leg is almost in line with the right. Carefully lift the right foot off the ground, bringing the knee in close to you.
 - Wow! You're standing on one leg.
 - Put the foot back down to the side.
 - Did the belly button shifting help prepare you for the move?
 - Was it much easier to hold the up position with the left foot in front, as opposed to beside it?
 - Why do you think this worked better? (More of the body weight is aligned over the base of support than when the foot is held to the side.)
- ⊙ Have participants do the same in the other direction. Participants shift or drag their belly button so it's over the left foot.
 - Lift the right foot, bringing the knee right and up toward the body. Balance a moment on one leg, again.
 - Can they notice how knee placement affects balance? It's a good time to stress "knee lift, abs in" posture.
- ⊙ Repeat these brief one-legged stands until they become easier.
- ⊙ Increase difficulty by having participants maintain balance longer on one leg.



Belly Steps

This is an intermediate activity of moderate difficulty. Belly Steps progress the knee-lifted, single-leg stance into a forward step. The goal is to get participants to step forward with their foot and their belly button, together. You want them to feel the sensation of moving their belly button forward and over the stepping foot. This will make subsequent stepping motions easier.

- ⊙ Participants shift their weight over the right foot, lift the left knee, and come into a single-leg stand.
- ⊙ Repeat to the left.
- ⊙ Continue repeating until participants show ability and confidence.
- ⊙ Progress to taking a step.
 - Shift weight to the right leg and lift the left knee. Hold a moment.
 - Step forward with the left foot as shown.
 - Land heel and then toe.
 - The belly button moves, too—it follows the foot.
 - Commit to the step. That means let the belly follow the left foot forward.
 - Then bring the other foot beside it.
- ⊙ Repeat a few times with each leg.
 - As the right foot steps, follow it with the belly button.
 - Land heel and then toe.
 - Bring the other foot beside it.
 - Ask, do you notice how the belly button helps initiate and then complete the step?



Belly Lunges

This is an intermediate activity of moderate difficulty. Lunge steps are bigger steps than normal and carry the person a longer distance. Participants should take turns doing this activity under your supervision.

- ⊙ Put down two lines of masking tape to form a *V* that is 6 to 10 feet (2-3 meters) long. The lines should be only 6 inches (15 centimeters) apart at the narrow end and 3 feet (1 meter) apart at the other end. Participants will practice crossing over the two lines at ever-widening spots using the techniques from Belly Steps. That means the belly button will move forward with the stepping leg for each step across the *V*. The ever-widening lines will soon require that they use a lunge step to cross.
- ⊙ One participant at a time will stand at the lines at a point they think they can cross safely. You should stand beside them and model the activity the first few times.



- ◎ Here are some cues to use as participants cross:
 - Make a plan and spot where you want your foot to land.
 - Weight shift to one leg.
 - Big knee lift with the other leg.
 - Step that foot out and across to the chosen spot. Move your foot, belly, and torso.
 - Land heel-toe and bring the other foot beside it. Stop there.
 - Did you make it? Did getting your belly out there help? Good job!
 - Belly Lunges are awesome. Turn around and do it again!
 - See how far up the *V* you can go.
 - Practice really improves this skill and reinforces the utility of the concept.

Belly-Ups

This is a difficult activity because it requires participants to climb stairs. Start by using one step placed near a handrail and spot them personally. Later you can progress to a short staircase with handrails. To step up each stair, participants place their whole foot on the stair and then move their weight (their belly button) over the ankle that is up. This moves their center of gravity forward and makes it easier to lift themselves up the stair.

- ◎ Participants step up and move the belly (torso) forward.
- ◎ They push through the up heel to lift their weight over that step.
- ◎ Bring the other leg forward and step up to the next step.
- ◎ Belly up and lift up to the next stair.
- ◎ Keep going for 8 to 12 steps, until they reach the top of the stairs, or until they tire.

Keep It Safe »

For the greatest balance safety, have participants take turns during most of these activities. Let participants choose what kinds of challenges they are willing to try.

Live It »

Participants should move belly and body together. Where the belly button goes, so goes the body. To be in balance, the center of gravity needs to be over the base of support.